ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 1-4

WASHINGTON TIMES
8 August 1985

Shevardnadze's urbane image belies a violent past

By Michael J. Bonafield
THE WASHINGTON TIMES FOREIGN SERVICE

GENEVA, Switzerland — "Mr. Clean," he is called, the toast of the Helsinki cocktail party circuit, a medium-sized man, with thinning silver hair, in a three-piece suit who looks like everyone's uncle from the Midwest.

He is Eduard Amvrosievich Shevardnadze, 57, the new foreign minister of the Soviet Union, who beguiled diplomats and reporters alike with his easy smile and amusing asides at the celebrations in Finland last week marking the 10th anniversary of the Helsinki Accords.

By all accounts, Mr. Shevardnadze ushered in an era of "personal amiability to superpower relations," as one journalist cooed, while the foreign minister lingered to chat with U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz in a 19th century gingerbread gazebo.

Whatever else he may be, Mr. Shevardnadze is distinctly different from his predecessor, the dour and humorless Andrei Gromyko, who presided over the Foreign Ministry for 27 years before Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev "promoted" him to the ceremonial role of president of the U.S.S.R. on July 2.

There is, however, more to Mr. Shevardnadze than his popular image as "Mr. Clean," the ex-secret policeman who waged a tireless campaign against Soviet Georgia's legendary corruption.

The fact is that the image of a benevolent uncle, white-haired and baby-faced, has been painstakingly cultivated by Mr. Shevardnadze to conceal the reputation for violence and ruthlessness he earned in his days as chief of Soviet Georgia's feared Ministry of Internal Affairs, or MVD.

According to underground documents published in the Soviet Union — usually on onionskin paper and circulated surreptitiously and which reached the West in 1975 — Mr. Shevardnadze personally authorized the torture of prisoners of Georgian jails.

These papers were the first indications that Soviet officials had set up what were to become known as "pressure cells," in which specially selected prisoners beat and torture other prisoners on the instructions of MVD and KGB investigators, usually to get desired "confessions."

Mr. Shevardnadze's name appears three times in letters circulated by the well-known Georgian dissident, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, between 1970 and 1973.

The first is in a statement by Yuri Tsirekidze, a criminal who tortured one of his victims in a pressure cell on the orders of a Tbilisi prosecutor, who, Tsirekidze said, received his instructions from Mr. Shevardnadze.

The second reference to the new Soviet foreign minister also came from Tsirekidze, this time in a statement during the trial in which he was charged with beating a fellow prisoner to death.

Tsirekidze is quoted in the letter as intimating that Mr. Shevardnadze personally thanked him for being a worthy agent of the Georgian MVD.

"Why did the Presidium knock two years off my [previous] term?" Tsirekidze asked the judge in his own defense. "Why did they express their gratitude? Why did Shevardnadze himself shake hands with me, a prisoner, if I was a bad guy?

"After all, I did have so many convictions. I destroyed thousands of people, but I saved the bacon of just as many cops."

The third mention of Mr. Shevardnadze comes from the pen of Mr. Gamsakhurdia, who compiled the letter. It is worth reading in its entirety.

"The widespread use of torture in [investigation prison] No. 1 by the MVD and Georgian KGB coincided with the period in office as MVD minister of E. Shevardnadze. ... It was he, too, who set up the special No. 2 block of the prison, a slaughterhouse for 'target' prisoners and a place for the MVD hangman's orgies, where the most horrible tortures were used: beatings with iron bars, prodding with steel needles and rods, hanging up prisoners by the feet, burning parts of the body with lighted cigarettes, holding prisoners under a hot shower, homosexual rape, and so on.

"The farce of an open trial of agents [between April 1 and 9, 1975] was staged to whitewash the MVD in the eyes of the public, to shift the entire blame on to the wretched prisoner-agent Tsirekidze, and to exonerate the main culprit, E. Shevardnadze and his clique."

The accuracy and authenticity of these reports have been corroborated by other writers, in addition to the personal statements of several of Tsirekidze's victims.

The documents present a portrait of Mr. Shevardnadze that is in striking contrast to much of what is being written of him now.

With his rise to the Foreign Ministry of the Soviet Union and full voting membership to the ruling Politburo, the question of exactly who Eduard Shevardnadze is takes on a special urgency.

The official record offers few clues.

He was born on Jan. 25, 1928, in the tiny village of Mamati in the Lanchkhuta region of western Georgia.

Almost nothing is known of his family background. His father was a teacher, and one elder brother, Akaki, was killed during World War II. Another brother, Ippokrat, died in 1978 after a "distinguished political career," and a third brother, Evgrafii, died last year.

Mr. Shevardnadze is a graduate of the history faculty of the Kutaisi Pedagogical Institute and the Party School of the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party.

A party member since 1948, he worked his way up the ladder to become in 1957 the first secretary of

Continued

the Georgian Komsomol, or party youth organization. In 1961, however, he transferred to party work, leaving the molding of Soviet youth in other hands.

His big break came in 1964 when he was appointed first deputy minister for the maintenance of public order, the ministry that was the forerunner of the MVD in Georgia. Within a year he had become full minister.

During his years in the MVD, Mr. Shevardnadze became familiar with the full range of what the Soviets obliquely call "negative phenomena" — bribery, extortion, speculation, nepotism, black-marketeerism and abuse of official privileges.

His approach to rooting out the corruption that was part and parcel of the regime of then Georgian Party First Secretary Vassili Mzhavanadze provides the first documented evidence of Mr. Shevardnadze's ability to tackle textbook problems with original and unorthodox methods.

Mr. Shevardnadze advanced in his career thanks to his relative success in establishing what his official Soviet biography ominously refers to as "exemplary social order" within the Georgian Republic.

That means, that within the bounds of reason, he stamped out much of the bribery, black marketeering, and protectionism that were the hallmarks of the Mzhavanadze regime — and eventually stamped out Mr. Mzhavanadze himself.

By July 1972, Mr. Shevardnadze was in complete possession of the Georgian Republic, in addition to a chef's salad of ribbons and medals, and the approving nod of the boss of bosses, party leader Leonid Brezhnev.

Mr. Shevardnadze's marching orders from the Kremlin were twofold: Put an end once and for all to corruption, and vitalize Georgia's stagnating economy.

The first of those goals proved markedly more elusive than the second.

To this day, the Georgian press is full of stories about bribery, embezzlement, theft, and black-marketeering on a fantastic scale.

On the other hand, over the 13 years of Mr. Shevardnadze's rule, Georgia enjoyed undoubted economic success. The major factor was the experimentation he encouraged.

The figures speak for themselves.

In a nation whose very name has become a synonym for economic ineptitude and failure, the Georgian Republic managed to meet a targeted 41 percent increase in industrial production. More impressively, the agricultural output rose on an average annual basis by 34 percent against the planned target of 29 percent.

These are not Soviet figures, which few analysts accord total respect, but the calculations of analysts in Western Europe. The trend in the Georgian Republic, the analysts say, is continuing: The targets have been met for the three key economic indicators for the first four years of the current five-year plan.

Impressive by any measure, spectacular by Soviet standards.

The development of Georgia's agricultural management system, which was Mr. Shevardnadze's brainchild, was closely monitored starting in 1973 by another young agricultural specialist, Mikhail Gorbachev.

Mr. Gorbachev visited Soviet Georgia in December 1980, and again in January 1983, presumably on a fact-finding mission prior to the Politburo's endorsement of Mr. Shevardnadze's unique programs.

Twelve months later, in January 1984, Mr. Gorbachev toured Georgia for the third time, and, after a lengthy meeting with Mr. Shevardnadze, issued a glowing report on the republic's economic progress.

Mr. Gorbachev liked what he saw, and obviously took a liking to the man who made it happen. From that point on, Western observers say, Mr. Shevardnadze's rise to even more important roles in the Soviet Union was assured.